

March 30, 2008
Rev. Tim Akers

We have shouted “He is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” We sang our Hallelujah’s. The white vestments were put out. We had our white lilies decorating the sanctuary. We celebrated Easter, the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well guess what, we aren’t done celebrating yet. Today is the second week of Easter and there are four more weeks of celebration to go. Just like the Lenten season lasts more than one week, the Easter season is six weeks. As Christians the resurrection of Jesus is an important event for our faith. From that day on being a follower of Christ, being a child God meant so much more.

So what does the resurrection mean for us now, a week after Easter, thousands of years later? That is the question Peter is addressing in his letter. I am sure the first century Christians were asking this same question. This letter of 1 Peter was not written for us, Christians in the 21st century, but for the followers who were a part of the first century church. In the first century Christianity was still new, it was a new religion which came out of Judaism, but was among many other religions and gods. Christianity was different because you worshipped and prayed to one God and you were a follower of a man named Jesus. This Jesus guy was believed to be divine, believed that he was God on earth. Christianity was something new and different in the first century. People were persecuted because they were Christians. This letter is referring to the suffering and persecution that is taking place and is written to encourage the readers to continue their Christian living, to remain faithful.

Since I met Laura I have started to do what some call recreational reading, or reading just for fun, because Laura’s family does a lot of reading. Now that I am part of the family I have read some of these books so I can join in the dinner conversation. One of the authors Laura and her family enjoy is John Grisham. One of his books that I’ve read is “The Street Lawyer.” If you haven’t read it, you can guess by the title it’s about a lawyer named Michael Brock who works for a big time, high powered law firm in Washington DC. Michael has done very well for himself and his name is one that is known in the DC area. One day Michael has an encounter with a homeless man that changes his life forever. That day, that encounter led Michael to make some changes in his life, changes to his lifestyle. The encounter led Michael to the law office of Mordecai Green, who is a lawyer and advocate for the homeless. Michael makes the decision to work with Mordecai. He makes the decision to leave his job at the big time, high powered law firm that paid him a very large salary, to be a voice for the homeless. He knew he could use his gifts, his knowledge of the law to help the homeless and those living in poverty. He chose to change his lifestyle from an upscale townhouse to a one bedroom apartment. Michael took a lot of ridicule from his colleagues at his law firm and family members. He was going to be doing work that he couldn’t make a name for himself or be successful; at least that is how his colleagues and family members saw it. He suffered through the ridicule from his family and friends because he truly believed the choice he made was the right thing to do. There’s a lot more to the story. I have not ruined the book for you if you want to read it, but I think you get my reason for sharing it with you.

Not only do I read a novel every now and then, but I read a few articles online and the magazines I subscribe to. One of the articles I read this past week was about a teenage boy who's a senior in high school. He was a star athlete who had a track record of drinking and doing drugs. He was a popular kid who had a lot of friends. The thing was, this popular guy liked to party. Then one day this young man made a choice. He decided to commit his life to Christ. He decided that he had to make some changes in his life. His conversion made a sudden impact on his life, so much that he felt he was on a secluded island. After the basketball games he wasn't going to the parties. During the games he wasn't given the same opportunities to shoot the ball, they didn't pass the ball to him. At school in the hallways he was no longer the "popular guy" with the girls or his other friends. This young man realized, in a painful way, that his commitment to Christ involves suffering. This is an example of a person experiencing pain and having a difficult time because he was a Christian.

I don't want you to think that I am downplaying the severity of the suffering of the first century Christians. I think it is safe to say that we most likely have never and will never experience suffering and persecution as it was in the early years of the church. We can't relate to that suffering. We do suffer but not to that extreme. I think we have to be careful when we interpret the letter of 1 Peter and relate it to our lives. We have to be careful that we don't trivialize the meaning of suffering found in this text. Today we can easily trivialize suffering into the "stresses in life," like the student studying for an exam or being emotionally drained after a job interview. Another way to look at it is catching "a bad break." The bad breaks of life are getting a flat tire on the interstate while it's raining while you're on your vacation. These stressful situations and bad breaks don't occur because of our faith. Making the choice not to drink and do drugs can cause you to lose your friends, to lose your social outlet. We make the choice to be faithful Christians. Being faithful requires us to make difficult decisions and that could cause us pain. Deciding to leave a high paying job and take a job that pays very little but helps people can cause us some anguish. At times we are tempted to compromise our faith to protect our affluent lifestyle, to keep what we have.

The first century Christians were tempted to compromise their faith and pour out a libation to the emperor because it would have been easier. What's the point, why are we putting ourselves through this? Is this suffering worth it? Peter reassures them to remain faithful, and remember that by God's mercy we are given new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remember "though you have not seen him, you love; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice!"

Being a follower of Christ is not easy. Jesus told us, "if you are going to follow me, you have to bear your cross." You are going to suffer. You might be experiencing a difficult time in your life as we speak. You might be dreading making a decision, even though you know it is the right thing to do, because you know with that change will come pain. You have to remember that by God's mercy we are given new birth into a living hope! Living hope is hope that gives new life! We are still celebrating the resurrection of our Christ! Through the resurrection we are assured of an inheritance that is indestructible, wholesome, unfading, and bigger and greater than anything we can imagine. God has given us the gift of salvation and when our day comes, God's merciful gift will be revealed to us in all its glory. But right now we have to have faith because we can't see or grab on to our inheritance. It's not sitting in a bank where we can see how

much we are going to get. I heard a pastor once say that, “Faith keeps believers steadfast while we wait for that heavenly inheritance.”

We are celebrating the glory of Easter. We can’t predict what’s going to happen a year from now, next month, next week, even tomorrow, but we do know that there will be pain and we will suffer. What we do know, what we are certain of, is that Jesus lives, Christ Jesus lives today. Though we want to turn and run from the pain, we stand faithfully with Christ in a living hope. That is what the resurrection means for us today. Alleluia!